

COMPANY GROWS IN NEW MARKET AND IMPROVES  
OPERATIONS

**ABOUT SCHWERDTLE, INC.** The Schwerdtle Stamp Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, is a 138-year-old, family-owned manufacturer of tools, dies and fixtures for decorating and marking a variety of products. With 35 employees, the company specializes in graphics and fabricating intricate precision parts.

**THE CHALLENGE.** As the plastic injection molding industry began its major exodus out of the U.S. to set up shop in China, Schwerdtle saw many of its customers follow suit, relocate, or close for lack of business. The company re-sized operations and focused more on the complex tooling required to decorate the products still being molded in the United States. When the recession of 2008 hit, the time had come for the sibling co-owners to retire, and the company sold its two buildings to fund their retirement. Another sibling management team inherited the business: daughter Katherine Schwerdtle Saint, as President, and her brother, John Schwerdtle II, as Vice President. Tasked with relocating the business to a single building, Saint began rethinking the company's business strategy and identifying potential areas for business growth. Having previously worked with CONNSTEP, part of the MEP National Network, she turned to them for additional assistance.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** CONNSTEP first assisted the Schwerdtle leadership team with the development of a strategic plan. When it became apparent that adequate growth required new markets, CONNSTEP facilitated an Ideation Workshop to help Schwerdtle identify new areas of potential business. The team engaged in a Fail Fast/Fail Cheap assessment of the new ideas and identified a defined need for a particular product: silicone sheets bonded to aluminum for tactile gripping of fragile products (by robots and other automated handling equipment).

The company's excellent graphics capabilities, coupled with its silicone bonding technology and ability to fabricate intricate precision parts, made it an outstanding candidate to produce such aids for robotics. This product turned out to be a trifecta: it was one of Schwerdtle's core capabilities, it lacked competition, and it was a new use of an essentially existing product. Soon, companies like Tesla, Gillette, Align Technology (the makers of Invisalign braces), and Jabil Packaging Solutions began buying silicone sheets and molded custom gripper fingers. By targeting a new market and improving operations, Schwerdtle has grown its customer base, reduced costs, created jobs, increased sales, and invested in ongoing training. The company moved to a single floor, lean-flow plant and purchased new CNC equipment.

"CONNSTEP's extensive industry experience helps them offer real value to manufacturers that goes far beyond Lean training. Schwerdtle may not have made it to a fourth generation of family owners without the help of CONNSTEP."

-Katherine Saint, President

## RESULTS



Added **2** jobs; retained 18 jobs



Increased sales by **\$400,000**



Investment of **\$590,000**



Cost savings of **\$300,000**



Increased customer base

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